

William Desmond and Contemporary Theology. Edited by Christopher Ben Simpson and Brendan Thomas Sammon. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2017. Pp. 301 + vii. Price \$50.00 (hbk). ISBN 9780268102210.

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William Desmond and Contemporary Theology is a book containing the reflections of 11 thinkers, in ten chapters (one of which is co-written), who elaborate on the relevance of William Desmond's thought for contemporary theology, with theology understood as the philosophical study of God and as an acknowledgement of the word of God as the beginning of all things that are, as documented in and through the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Desmond, nonetheless, is well aware of the effect of Kant's embargo on such traditional metaphysics and the dominance of Hegel's dialectical manner of thinking, however vehemently extolled or viciously opposed, within contemporary philosophy of religion and theology. If Joseph K. Gordon and D. Stephen Long are correct to see in Hegel 'the protestant Thomas Aquinas' (p. 155), then this leaves open the position for someone, Desmond, to be the catholic Thomas Aquinas, given Aquinas pre-dates the Reformation. This is the overall merit of this book, for it draws attention to the radical post-Kantian engagement that Desmond has initiated and that could only unfold after Kant and Hegel in light of what went before and in such thinkers as Aquinas, Anselm, and Augustine, and many more.

Several articles in this collection address ideas in Desmond and Aquinas together, e.g., for Renée Köhler-Ryan (Chapter Seven), it is the *metaxological dimension* (elaborated by Desmond) that gives analogy (in Aquinas's thinking of God) its power; whereas for Patrick X. Gardner (Chapter Six), it is the *analogical dimension* (elaborated by Aquinas-Przywara) that gives metaxology (in Desmond's thinking of God) its power. In either case, Desmond is used to help us understand better Aquinas, and Aquinas is being used to help us understand better Desmond.

Gordon and Long (Chapter Five) show how a metaxological reading of St Anselm's *Proslogion* in terms of the unfolding of a prayer that contains a perplexity in the thinking of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought that is 'unavoidable,' reveals this starting point not to be a premise of a logical argument to be later used to prove, dialectically or univocally, the existence of such a being, Hegel's 'counterfeit double of God' (p. 155), but 'a form of thought willing to be perplexed by the self in the between' (p. 145).

Brendan Thomas Sammon (Chapter One) re-examines the role, significance, importance, and meaning of the concept of beauty as it straddles metaphysical and theological meditations on the Divine Names in neo-platonic influenced emanationist views of creation in and between Dionysius and Aquinas. This, in turn, contributes to understanding Desmond's work in metaxological metaphysics itself.

John R. Betz (Chapter Two) approaches Desmond's thinking as an original challenge to Heidegger's accusation of the forgetfulness of the question of being in the origins of western metaphysics in general and Christian metaphysics in particular. Betz retrieves what is 'forgotten or *misremembered*' (following Cyril O'Regan, p. 67, and corresponding p. 87, n. 27) in Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics, yet of fundamental importance to Heidegger's own way of thinking, such as, the real distinction between essence

and existence in relation to creator and created reality as well as the wonder in the face of *that* beings are at all that is evoked in Thomistic metaphysics. This enables this author to read in tandem Erich Przywara's work in the analogy of being with Desmond's 'metaxological space' in relation to 'the question of existence [finite being] as a question' in metaphysics (pp. 80–1).

Corey Benjamin Tutewiler (Chapter Three) engages directly with Quentin Meillassoux's attempt to think the necessity of finitude as an ontological necessity in being that renders our human knowledge-claims finite, and not the usual post-Kantian stress on the unknowability of the 'thing in itself' due to the limits of human reason characteristic of post-modern post-Kantian rejections of traditional metaphysics. Tutewiler contends (correctly), in agreement with Desmond, that embracing ontological contingency of being a being at all is *more* securely anchored in its 'necessity,' if thought of as originating in a 'gratuitous gift' of a Creator God who wills, freely and without compulsion, the good of such being ('the Good of being itself,' p. 110).

D.C. Schindler (Chapter Four) finds in Desmond's meditations on being, a 'positivity of being' (p. 121–25) that emerges from within a metaphysics of creation out of nothing by a God of love and (metaphysical) goodness to which Desmond is religiously committed. This enables Schindler to unfold 'a particular interpretation of that [Desmond's] philosophy specifically with a view to theological engagement' (p. 121) that is similar (yet different, as similarity implies difference) to Josef Pieper's account (p. 126) and beyond Gianni Vattimo's need to replace the desire for truth, generating fascism, for a postmodern desire for love (p. 127), following upon Kant's need to restrict reason in light of securing faith without ultimate confidence (*con-fides*) in either faith or human reason (pp. 128–29), whilst escaping Jean-Luc Marion's ultimatum 'to reject metaphysics in order to avoid preset [aprioristic] conditions of possibility,' which, however, 'reveals only that Marion does not have a specifically "metaxological" notion of being' (p. 137, n. 30).

Following Desmond's diagnosis, Christopher R. Brewer (Chapter Eight) argues that while post-Kantian atheists critique the lack of evidential ground and rationality in the proofs of the existence of God and post-Kantian fideistic theists critique the lack of evidential ground and rationality in belief in God (p. 220), both miss out the context of the 'between' from within such thinking and belief in God emerges. What is also left out, Brewer notes, is the relation of philosophy, natural theology and the arts. Thus Brewer finds in Desmond's reflections on the between of theology, philosophy, and art (in Hegel) a certain resourcefulness (*ressourcement*) which Harold E. Root (1926–2007) called for in the face of his diagnosis of the malady affecting theology (since Descartes) 'as a result of theology's isolation from the arts' (p. 217).

Cyril O'Regan (Chapter Nine) recalls central features of Desmond's 'unsystematic reflections' (p. 242) on Gnosticism which he finds useful for correcting misinterpretations and evaluating heuristically 'forms of Gnosticism' (p. 247) of the past and the return of Gnosticisms in the modern period. To do this, O'Regan uses the 'epistemic-ontological form of doubling' Desmond identifies that is operative in ancient Gnosticism from his *God and the Between* (Chapter Ten) and the 'hermeneutic doubling' of the standard Christian view from his *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* Since O'Regan, a long-time traveller on this journey, finds Desmond a *path-finder* in understanding and analysing

Gnosticism afresh, it is with dutiful and considered respect and gratitude that this most persistent and incisive reading of Desmond's work ends in a 'Thank you' (p. 262).

The last chapter of the collection explores the silences surrounding what is *not expressly articulated* about the between by Desmond, yet which, perhaps, makes the between silent, if not acknowledged, for thinkers and ordinary man-in-the-street alike. Sin, John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Chapter Ten) argues, is a religious concept denoting a break in the relationship between the human being and God. Though this concept is not developed by Desmond in any systematic manner, sin is of concern in metaxology precisely because the latter is a meditation on the between of created being of things that are at all and our human response to the giver of this gift of being, God, given our human being's fallen nature. Yet despite this, since we can view what is given in being as either 'a gift over which one is full with gratitude' or 'a given something over which I have no choice' (p. 279), we can choose to seek the giver as agapeic origin, and so, affirm a genuine 'beginning' or 'cause' to my life outside of my life that which is Other to my existence in the between; or, I can choose to re-assert my own self, over which there is no freedom or gift of love (goodness) in its basis. Here, we can proceed with Heidegger, to articulate from within this thrownness in being, a self-justifying ontological guilt—guilty as charged of being—where 'the call of conscience' is heard as emanating only from the self to the self about that self's ontological guilt (*causa sui*) to the exclusion of the Other. Sin, this author argues, is a 'turning away from God to other self-made gods' (p. 284). Thus far from demonstrating man's atheistic condition, this very turning way, again in line with Desmond, marks a certain 'religious promiscuity' (p. 284) (and the 'doubling of a counterfeit God,' though the latter is not the object of enquiry in this final paper).

For the uninitiated, those who wish to jump in and engage in re-appropriating Christian metaphysics for contemporary theology, this book is a very good starter with Desmond and company. For the more advanced, however, Schindler does raise the question and possibility that if the metaxological manner of thinking is based upon the actuality of positive faith in Judeo-Christian revealed religion, then there must be a theological thinking commensurate to a philosophical thinking such as Desmond's to keep the between open and the metaxological way of thinking a possibility for philosophy *and* theology (pp. 133–35).

Catholicism and Citizenship: Political Cultures of the Church in the Twenty-First Century. By Massimo Faggioli. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2017. Pp. 165. Price \$24.49 (pbk). ISBN 978-0-8146-8423-8.

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On 15 September 2008, the investment bank Lehmen Brothers collapsed, escalating the collapse of the global economy into the greatest recession since the Great Depression. The parallels to the 1930s ushered in a widespread concern among commentators about the political consequences: would the economic shock be a catalyst for similar social and political developments 80 years previously? Today, the alarm, it appears, is becoming all the more real.